

The Angels

Messengers from a loving God



**Divine Mercy
Healed Me**
Chariots of God
Let God Take Control
On the Train of Our Lord
Birthday of Our Lady

St Michael does not act with his own power but with the power of God



■ Official logo of the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel

He always humbles himself before God who is his Lord and Creator. St Michael would like us to know him, to share the power with us and, lead us to happiness - understood as living in a deep, intimate relationship with the Living God. He helps us to avoid temptation and sin.

Think of these words. Look around you. Open the eyes of your soul and notice your invisible friends and allies given to us by God that are saintly angels and, particularly, St Michael the Archangel.

Our Lady is his Queen and Queen of all the angels. St Michael is the greatest benefactor of humanity. He is the guardian and friend of people coming down from this world and even after leaving this earth.

St Michael was sent to us by God for him to be closer to us and offer us graces. The angels always accompany God and us, always at

God's side and at our side. The angels stand forever before God, whom they glorify and contemplate and serve people.

It is the expression of the greatest intimacy and connection with God and human beings. The more they serve God, the more they are able to serve human beings. Likewise, when we as human beings open ourselves to God, the more we are capable of serving others. This is what St Michael the Archangel teaches us.

I assure you of the constant daily prayers of the priests of the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel for all our readers and their families.

God bless you,

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA

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The Angels

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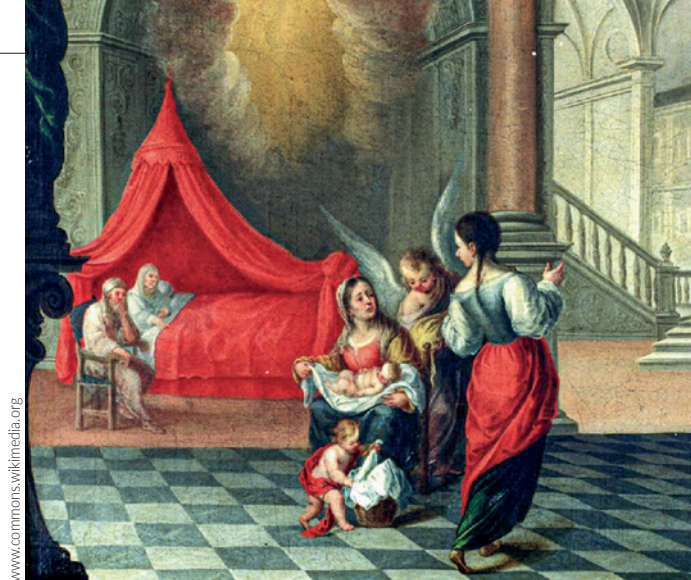
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Birthday of Our Lady

On 8th September we celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



■ The Birth of the Virgin by Matias de Arteaga, 17th cent.

Our Lady, the Mother of God and the Mother of each one of us, is the greatest and loveliest human person who ever walked this earth. Her parents Anne and Joachim must have been very special people to give birth to such a grace-filled loving person who, alone of all humans, was conceived immaculate and whom sin never touched throughout her life. St Alphonsus tells us that Mary had more grace given her at the moment of her existence than all the angels, the saints and everyone put together received. What a special person she is! How much God loved her and how much we should respect her.

The more grace God gives a person, of course, the more He expects from them. Mary did not disappoint God: her response to Him was courageous and wholehearted. She had just one thought and that was to please God at all times. It was as if, at the beginning of her life, she signed a cheque to God and left it blank - so that He could stipulate the price she should pay! The amount was immense because it involved standing at the foot of the Cross and seeing her Son die the cruellest of deaths. As Simeon had prophesied "a sword pierced her heart" when the soldier's lance pierced

her dead Son, but she lovingly and willingly gave her will to the Father.

She was fortunate beyond our understanding to have had her Son to herself for 30 years. Then the time came for her to let Him go to begin His mission of finding twelve men who would begin His Church and continue His work. When He was 12 years old, she had lost Him for three days and it broke her heart. Now she would follow His progress and support Him on His journey to the Cross, for which Jesus would have prepared His Mother to enable her to knowingly participate in His Sacrifice and make it even more perfect.

Today, when we think of Jesus who took our human nature and Mary

who was a human person like ourselves, we have our true models. We can be proud to be human like them. They inspire us to lead better lives. But when we do look at our lives, we realise we fall far short of the persons we should be, and so we beg them to help us to be the people our heavenly Father intended us to be.

On this the birthday of Our Lady we thank Jesus, while hanging on the Cross, for giving us His Mother to be our Mother. May Mary help us to love her Son as generously and courageously as she did.

Fr Francis Maple OFM Cap,

The Franciscan Friary, 15 Cuppin Street,
Chester, Cheshire CH1 2BN, U.K.

Dignified Queen of Heaven

Supreme Lady of the Angels, who from the beginning received the power and mission to trample Satan's head, we humbly beg You, send Your holy hosts so that, under Your commands and through Your power, they will pursue the evil spirits, fight them wherever they are present, neutralize their actions and cast them down into the abyss of hell. Who is like God! Holy angels and archangels, defend us, protect us! O tender Mother, You are and You will remain forever our love and hope. Amen.

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Let God Take Control

Our Resurrected Lord Jesus entreated us during the Octave of Easter that we open our hearts fully to His Fount of Divine Mercy, His Most Sacred Heart, from which pour His every grace and favor in perfect Love.

On Divine Mercy Sunday the Church celebrated the depths of God's mercy that emanate from His Love, a love that has suffered passionately for us and conquered death to bring new life eternally at Easter to those who believe.

In the message of Divine Mercy, Jesus expresses His intimate desire to enter into the temple of our heart, but for Him to be able to enter we first must open the door of our heart to His Divine Love. Jesus gently knocks at our door and awaits our response,

reassuring us not to be afraid but rather to trust always in Him. Only in opening our hearts to Him may we plunge into the depths of the flows of love and mercy that emanate from Jesus' Sacred Heart.

Birth of the Church

Since the fourth century, St Augustine has taught the Christian Faithful that the Living Water pouring eternally forth from the Heart of Jesus is none other than the birth waters of the

Church in the Sacrament of Baptism. The Church is born precisely at the moment that the Roman soldier's lance pierces open the Sacred Heart of our Lord. The cleansing waters of Baptism, alongside the passionately loving water of the Most Holy Eucharist, flow sacramentally from the Heart of Christ to water the souls of the People of God, bringing us to realize the steadfast and saving hope found only in a personal encounter and relationship with our All-Merciful Lord.

What Do You See in the Blessed Sacrament?

It is impossible for us to love and adore Christ deeply enough as He is present in the Most Holy Eucharist. When we are before Him, present in the Most Holy Eucharist, we should see the Almighty God present in veiled form. He is: Mercy, Eternal Life, The Eternal God, The Savior of Sinners, The Living Water, The Fire of Pure Love, The Medicine for All Our Ills, All Sentiments of Love, The Hope of All, The Lifter of Burdens...and He is worthy of all our trust.

What do you see when you gaze upon the Sacred Host? With your eyes you see bread, but with your soul you should see God. You should see God in all His glory and power and you should adore Him with all your might. Consider how you relate to our Lord as He is present in the Holy Eucharist. Pray that God will flood your mind with a true knowledge of Him and inspire your heart with a burning love.

The Blessed Sacrament is truly sacred. It is revered and treated with the greatest respect. We would never throw our Lord away or discard Him on the floor or in some irreverent place. And yet we often fail to treat others with the same respect we show Jesus present in the Sacred Host.

Each Person is a Tabernacle

Do you realize that each person is a tabernacle? Each person is an image of God and is precious and sacred beyond imagination. We must see all people this way and we must seek to treat them with the greatest

reverence and respect. In doing so, we honour our Divine Lord more than we could ever know. Reflect upon how you treat others this day. Reflect upon whether or not you treat them with the same love and respect you would show our Lord in the Sacred Host. Ask Jesus to help you to see His divine presence in everyone you meet.

Principal Duty of the Church

St John Paul II considered his preaching on the love and mercy of our Lord to be central to the mission of his pontificate, as we see in his great encyclical letter on Divine Mercy, *Dives in misericordia*. The words of the Blessed Apostle of Divine Mercy echo now for all future generations concerning our celebration of the profound mercy of our Lord: "The Church must consider it one of her principal duties - at every stage of history and especially in our modern age - to proclaim and to introduce into life the mystery of mercy, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. Not only for the Church herself as the community of believers but also in a certain sense for all humanity, this mystery is the source of a life different from the life which can be built by man".

Pope Benedict told the participants at the conclusion of the first World Apostolic Congress on Mercy that the Church holds in her grasp a Divine Mercy mandate to be fulfilled: "I address my cordial greeting which now becomes a mandate: Go forth and be witnesses of God's mercy, a source of hope for every person and for the whole world. May the Risen Lord be with you always!"

Spiritual Journey with Jesus

When you are at church, do you listen? Specifically, do you listen to the voice of God? Often times we sit and listen to the homily and our mind wanders and we miss all or most of what was said. Where does your mind wander? The truth is that sometimes a wandering mind is from the Lord. Sometimes there may be one thing said at Mass that our Lord then places on your heart to ponder. Do not be afraid to let Jesus take you on a spiritual journey while at Mass or while alone in prayer. He may often wish to speak a homily directly to your soul.

Reflect, today, upon how well you reflect. True prayerful reflection is not simply daydreaming. It's not distraction that leads us to obsess or worry about this thing or that. Prayerful reflection is a way of letting God take hold of our imagination so as to lead us into His Truth. He often desires to lead us into a particular word of Truth that we need to know at that time. How well do you do this? Ponder your prayerful pondering and next time you pray do not be afraid to let God take control.

Be not afraid

In Pope John Paul II's last Divine Mercy message said: "As a gift to humanity, which sometimes seems bewildered and overwhelmed by the power of evil, selfishness and fear, the Risen Lord offers His love that pardons, reconciles and reopens hearts to love. It is a love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much the world needs to understand and accept Divine Mercy!"

In Pope John Paul II's opening words of his pontificate to the world on October 22, 1978, the Saint exhorted the Christian Faithful to break down any walls that would keep them from encountering the Lord of Divine Love and Mercy: *Non abbiate paura. Aprite, anche spalancate le porte a Cristo!* Be not afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ!

This initial message of John Paul II's pontificate was punctuated for the Christian faithful to see on last Sunday morning along the Colonnade of St Peter's Square. In the Gospel of Divine Mercy Sunday, we also heard Jesus encourage and strengthen His disciples: Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit! At the moment of His death on the Cross, Jesus -- full of the Holy Spirit -- pours forth His Love and Mercy upon the world in a certain sense passively (having just died on the Cross as Son of Man), at the moment of the Roman centurion's piercing Jesus' Sacred Heart. At the same time, Jesus as Eternal Son of God actively permits this piercing so that He may pour forth His Love and Mercy from the Cross transcending all ages, gushing forth the flows of the Holy Spirit as the never ending Source and Fountain of Eternal Life.

Love flowing from Lord's Heart

As Pope Benedict so beautifully articulated, we encounter in John Paul II a man of God who wrote his last encyclical without words as he suffered and died, teaching us how to do so in true belief, where he (and we with him) would discover genuine freedom in total abandonment to the loving mercy of Jesus Christ.

Do you love with a pure love? What does this form of love look like? Pure love is one that flows directly from the Heart of Christ to and through your life. This holy love has beautiful characteristics. First, it is plentiful. When we love with the Heart of Christ we love in abundance. There is no limit to how much love we can share. It's like the brightness of the sun at noon casting rays on all below. Second, it's ingenious, doing what is pleasing to God. It is not cautious or calculated. It does not hesitate or evaluate. Rather, the wisdom of love is immediate and knows in each moment how to radiate God's love. And third, it is happy. Even when love calls one to heroic sacrifice there is great delight in this total self-giving.

Reflect, today, upon how fully you love with a pure and generous heart. Do you give of yourself in abundance? Is it a delight to serve without counting the cost? Do you easily find ways to show Mercy to others and delight in doing so? Ponder these questions today and pray that the Lord shines through all you do. May we open wide the doors of our hearts to Jesus' Divine Love and Mercy, so that the Sacred Heart of Jesus may pour forth the Holy Spirit into our hearts of stone and convert them to hearts of flesh united in Him.

Heavenly Food Is Necessary

Sometimes we do not feel like going to Mass or may be deeply distracted as we approach the Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps one of the best things to do in this case is to live in holy obedience. Jesus wants you

to receive Holy Communion every Sunday and every holy day because He knows you need it. He knows that this Food from Heaven is necessary for you to obtain happiness. It is the Gift of Himself given freely and completely to you. And He commands you to attend the Holy Mass for your own good.

Reflect, today, upon your attitude toward the Gift of the Holy Mass. Do you attend faithfully? That is, without fail? Are you perfectly obedient to our Lord's command? And when there, how do you enter into the Mass? Do you pray and seek Him inviting Him into your soul? After you receive Holy Communion do you kneel and truly pray? We could never be grateful enough for this sacred Gift. Make your next Holy Communion one that sets you down a path of holiness.

May we always hold with loving devotion the Church's liturgical prayer for the feast of St Pope John Paul II:

*O God, who are rich in mercy,
And who willed that
the Blessed John Paul II
Should preside as Pope
over your universal Church,
Grant, we pray, that instructed
by his teaching,
We may open our hearts
to the saving grace of Christ,
The sole Redeemer of mankind.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God forever and ever.
Amen.*

Fr Matthew Szerszeń CSMA

Divine Mercy Sunday 2024, Elmore
Abbey, England

The Grace of Divine Mercy leads Us to the Confessional

For over 33 years organizing Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations in different locations, I have witnessed God's healing grace and the Holy Spirit who opened and converts hearts during the homily.

It is Our Lord who gives us peace and a deeper understanding of His mercy; as we may not always be fully aware of it.

Parishioners listen to the priest say 'The feast of Divine Mercy, according to the diary of Sister Faustina receives from Jesus the biggest promises of grace related to the Devotion of Divine Mercy, in particular that a person who goes to sacramental confession (*the confession may take place some days before*) and receives holy communion on that day, shall obtain the total atonement of all their sins and punishment. That means each person would go immediately after death to heaven without suffering in purgatory.'

The gift of grace

Upon hearing these words I have seen people's hearts and souls touched in the most extraordinary way with a desire to go to confession on this feast day, in some cases after 20 or 35 years.

After going to confession and receiving absolution from the priest there are many tears, a joy like no other, tears that they have been forgiven, healed, filled with peace and joy. Grace is an



active power in our lives that inspires, redeems, nourishes and heals us. It directs and protects us. An acceptance of God's grace allows us to put the past behind us. However, grace is much more than just erasing the past; it is about writing the future. That is because when we are freed from regrets, blame and shame we can show grace to others.

Only in heaven will we understand the full depths of God's mercy.

When people approach the throne of mercy and open their wounds before the merciful Jesus and allow Him to heal them, to flood them with the oil of His forgiveness. Allowing Him to robe us with new clothes – allowing Him to give us new eyes, new ears and a new tongue, as they immerse themselves with greater trust in the ocean of God's mercy and can with confidence say 'Jesus I trust in You.'

God is forgiving, full of love and mercy. We should show mercy to our

neighbours. Doing an act of both penance and charity we should also feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, ransom the captive, bury the dead, shelter the stranger, comfort the sick and clothe the naked. (Diary, 742)

Eternal happiness in heaven with God

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. It affirms that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. It assures us that Christ died for our sins and was raised again on the third day for our justification. Jesus' Passion is the source of our hope, which leads us to invoke God for his mercy.

Jesus is the one who reminds us that heaven is our goal. He is also the one who enables and empowers us to get there.

Noreen Bavister, U.K.

Divine Mercy Healed Me

Four days before God intervened, the doctor said there was no cure for my osteoarthritis. He only could offer a medicine to minimize pain.

I've lived with back pain for years. Not just back pain, but the kind of pain that keeps me from finishing my housework or keeps me from standing too long. The kind of pain that emanates from your spine across your body until all you feel is aching and fatigue. To relieve the pain, I would take aspirin, stand under the scalding hot water of a shower, then lay down on a heating pad. This only cut the pain enough to make it manageable; but it never went away. It was always there, making me wince and struggle to get through the day. My rheumatologist said there was no cure for osteoarthritis and that the best he could offer was medication to minimize the pain or a

spine specialist for back surgery. Even then, I would not be "cured" and would still have to manage the pain for the rest of my life. He told me this only four days before God intervened.

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz, CSMA, traveled from his home in Poland to observe Divine Mercy Sunday with St Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Cedar Park, Texas. Divine Mercy Sunday is eight days after Easter and the annual day of grace when faithful Catholics are forgiven and cleansed. We observe this holy time throughout the weekend. Fr Peter performed Mass for all three days, which began on the feast day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Devotion. That Friday, after

the gospel was shared and communion was taken, he invited anyone who needed special prayers to come to the altar. I stepped forward with my fellow parishioners to form a semi-circle around the blessed altar. He told us to focus our minds on what prayer we needed as he would walk to each person one at a time to pray.

I did not have anything specific on my mind except good health. I was just praying for Jesus to heal my body. I received my prayers and held them close to my heart all the way home. The next day, I returned to church for another Mass. Again, Fr Peter invited the good people of St Margaret Mary to come to the altar for special prayers. Again, I assembled with the others to focus on our requests and receive God's grace through his words. On the third day, for Divine Mercy Sunday, the church was full; more so than the other days. So, when he invited the congregation to step forward this time, I stayed behind. I could see there were a lot of people lined up who wanted prayer and I did not want to take space from anyone else. I wanted to be sure everyone had the chance to receive this wonderful gift. Instead, I went to the narthex and volunteered to help Sister Patsy and Sister Priscilla with the rosary table. They had many religious items spread out for parishioners to have blessed by Fr Peter before he left. I went to him and asked him to bless my rosary, chaplet and candles. Again, I received prayers and left feeling grateful that he had joined us during this holy time.



■ Glass window: "Those who were suffering from diseases and painful complaints of one kind or another, were all brought to him, and he cured them" Mt 4:24

On Monday morning, I woke up feeling different. I felt my body needed a rest after a weekend of activity, so I spent the day resting. Tuesday, I had a little energy but chose to rest another day. On the third day, something happened; I woke up with no back pain for the first time in a long time. I just attributed this to my restful days, so I immediately started my housework and errands. I wanted to try and work quickly because I knew the arthritis would reappear in a few hours and knock me down again, per usual. As I was finishing my chores, I expected my back to start hurting; but the pain never came. The next day, no pain, or the next day, or the next, no pain. It was gone. I was amazed. I started reflecting on what was different and realized I was different since the prayers of Fr Peter. I thought I must be healed. My skeptical brain told me to wait a little longer, that the pain would return; but my faithful brain told me it would not...and it did not.

Weeks went by and the pain never returned. I was working and moving without aches, without wincing and without hesitation. I knew I was healed! That is when I started sharing the good news with my children, my cousins, my friends and neighbours, anyone who would listen. I told them, "Christ heals" and "prayers are answered". This is why I am sharing my story. I want anyone who is hurting to be reminded that God is good. Stay strong in your faith. Psalm 30:2: "Lord my God, I called to You for help, and You healed me."

Felicia T, USA
June 2024

Are the Fires of Purgatory Real Fires? (part 3)

The Catholic doctrine of purgatory is inseparable from the Catholic understanding of the distinction between the "temporal" and "eternal" punishment that is due to sin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this distinction in entry 1472: *To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand, every sin, even venial sin, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth or after death in the state called purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment remains.*

Scripture is replete with examples of the Lord leaving a temporal punishment for sin in place even after someone has attained a measure of

repentance for their sins. In his book 'The Salvation Controversy', James Akin gives many clear examples, including the following (p. 44): *When he forgave David for his sin concerning Uriah, he still left David the temporal punishment of having his infant son die and having the sword pass through his house (2 Sam. 12:13ff). Similarly, when Moses struck the rock a second time, God forgave him (for Moses was obviously one of the saved, as his appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration illustrates), though he still suffered the temporal penalty of not being allowed to go into the Promised Land (Num. 20:12).*

We see this distinction between the temporal and eternal penalty for sin also exhibited in the penitential system practiced in the early Church. Jesus had promised his apostles: "Whatever sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and whatever sins you retain, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).

Sackcloth and Ashes

In the first centuries, this meant that when Christians committed grave

sins after their baptism, they would have to confess those sins publicly, in the presence of their bishop (a successor of the apostles) before the entire Christian community! (I guess we can all be rather glad that Irish monks propagated private confession in the early Middle Ages, and that this became the norm in the Catholic Church thereafter!).

The bishop would only agree to pronounce the public absolution of such sinners after they had undergone a period of penance, usually in the form of so many days, months or years of exclusion from Holy Communion, as well as fasting, and the wearing of penitential clothing ("sackcloth and ashes"). This penance was designed to deepen their contrition and remit their remaining moral debt to God, and it could be shortened by the bishop, or removed completely, on evidence of true, deep and lasting contrition by the sinner. Once the absolution was finally given by the bishop, forgiveness of sins was complete - in other words, no temporal moral debt to God for those sins was considered owing any longer.

Private Confessions

In later centuries, with the spread of the tradition of private confession to a priest (who is a delegate of the bishop), the necessary penance or "satisfaction" for sins was projected into the future, so that one either had to complete the purgation of one's soul by accomplishing with a pure intention the penances assigned by the priest, or complete that purification beyond death, in the state of purgatory.

The last sentence of the quote from Catechism, entry 1472 (above)

is especially important. It talks about the possibility of a deep "conversion" from sin that "proceeds from a fervent charity", thereby resulting in the "complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment [temporal or eternal] would remain."

First of all, this explains why Jesus could say to the penitent thief crucified alongside him on Calvary: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). The good thief evidently had attained such a true faith in Christ, and such complete repentance for sin (see his words in Lk. 23:40-42!) that there was no longer any need for purification in the next life.

Second, this passage in the Catechism implies that although there is indeed a penal or judicial aspect of the doctrine of purgatory, there is no such thing as a merely punitive or vengeful response by God to human sin. Rather, all of God's acts of justice express also His merciful love, and serve His merciful purposes.

Merciful Love and Justice of God

For example, the Church teaches that the principal way that Jesus Christ loved us was to offer for us, as God incarnate, a life and death of "superabundant merit" before the throne of His heavenly Father. His infinite merits, when applied to us, are the basis in divine justice for all the merciful graces of pardon, renewal and sanctification that He freely pours out upon us in this present life, and in the life to come. Good Friday especially manifests both the merciful love and the justice of God, for Christ both makes "compensation" for our sins on the Cross, and yet at the same time, He



■ Virgin of Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory, by Diego Quispe Tito, late 17th century

does so on our behalf, for we were incapable of making any such offering ourselves [on divine justice and merciful love expressed in Christ's saving work on the Cross, see Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter, *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy), section 7.3]. Similarly, when the Eternal Judge condemns a cold-hearted, unrepentant soul to everlasting damnation, it is certainly an act of divine justice (Rom. 12:19: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."), but it is also an act of merciful love.

Clearly, the doctrine of purgatory must also be a manifestation of our Saviour's justice, and at the same time of His merciful love. Those who die in a state of weak love for Christ and weak faith in Him, and who, therefore, have attained only a half-hearted and partial repentance for their sins, are just not ready for the selfless love and adoration of God that is involved in joyful communion with Him in heaven. Besides, such souls remain, to

some extent, in a state of moral debt to God, because the infinite merits of Christ's sacrificial life and death cannot fully apply to those only partially penitent.

Healing Disordered Attachments

What, then, can our merciful Saviour do for them? To cure them of their spiritual defects, pulling them away from their disordered attachments to creatures and from their own pride, is inevitably very painful, just as pulling an infected tooth inevitably involves temporary pain. At the same time, the pain involved in this healing process clears their debt to divine justice for their half-hearted discipleship and repentance. Thus, the merciful Jesus purifies these souls by remitting their punishment in a way that heals them.

Of course, those who attain true and perfect contrition in this earthly life or at the time of death, in other words, deep penitence for their sins out of true love for God and faith in Him, are already purified: Christ's merits cover all the debt to divine justice due to their sins, both temporal and eternal, and they are filled to overflowing with His grace. They go directly to heaven upon their death: such are most of the saints. But for the rest of us, our repentance is motivated more by fear of the consequences of our sins, and disgust at ourselves, than by fervent charity for God and our neighbours. We are not so much concerned that we have let Him down, who infinitely loved us, and we have not yet fully put our trust in Him. We still need to let go of our improper pride, and our disordered attachments: a "letting-go"

and healing process that can be completed beyond death, by the merciful love of God.

Divine Surgery

Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians have sometimes "fallen out" with each other on the nature of purgatorial pain. What does this divine surgery on the soul involve? Is it a "fire" that somehow heals? Father Kenneth Baker, SJ, reflected on this aspect of the mystery of purgatory in volume three of *Fundamentals of Catholicism* (pp. 375-376): *We are not certain about the nature of the punishment of purgatory. The Church does not teach dogmatically [that is, definitively] that it is a "physical fire," even though many preachers and some catechisms speak of "the fires of purgatory." The official declarations of the Councils speak only of purifying punishments, not purifying fire. Whatever it is, it is painful.*

We need to go beyond Fr Baker's reflections here and say that this "fire" cannot literally be "physical" fire because the souls in purgatory were separated from their bodies at death, and will not receive new and heavenly bodies until the Judgment Day. Nevertheless, while we do not need to take the Biblical and traditional language about purgatorial flames literally, we do need to take it seriously. This metaphor of "fire" must refer to some kind of burning spiritual pain. St Gregory of Nyssa once wrote in his Sermon about the Dead: "Man will not be able to be a partaker of divinity until a purgatorial fire will have cleansed away any stain found on his soul."

Thus, the fires of purgatory must be painful indeed, but spiritually

necessary to our healing, and to the clearing of any remaining moral debt to God's justice for our sins. Saint Theresa of Avila once wrote (*Interior Castle*, part 6, chapter 11): *The pain of loss, or the privation of the sight of God, exceeds all the most excruciating [spiritual] sufferings we can imagine, because the souls urged on towards God as to the centre of their aspiration, are continually repulsed by His justice. Picture to yourself a shipwrecked mariner who, after having battled with the waves, comes at last within the reach of the shore, only to find himself constantly thrust back by an invisible hand.*

Compassion for the Souls in Purgatory

In fact, many Catholic saints have had private revelations, sometimes in the form of visions, about the nature of the spiritual surgery that souls undergo in purgatory. Although such testimony is not the equivalent of a definitive teaching of the Church's Magisterium, it would surely be rash and imprudent to contradict the concurrent testimony of the saints, given that they were full to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth and Love. We can be sure that the reason God unveiled this mystery to His saints was not simply to frighten them, or their readers, about the nature of purgatory, but to move them with compassion for the souls undergoing purification there, and to urge them to come to their aid.

Dr Robert Stackpole, STD

The director of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, USA.

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Angels Unveiled: Divine Encounters in the Bible (part 3)

Angelic presence is woven into the very fabric of the Bible, where their appearances range from awe-inspiring to comforting, mysterious to life-altering.

Join us on a celestial journey as we unveil the captivating encounters with angels that have left an indelible mark on the pages of the Holy Scriptures, bridging the mystical realm with our earthly existence.

Angel Announcing the Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1)

It tells a story of a devout Jewish priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God, but they had not been able to conceive a child.

One day, while Zechariah was performing his priestly duties in the temple, he had a remarkable encounter with an angel named Gabriel. Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, announcing that his wife Elizabeth would conceive a son in her old age; "The angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you shall name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink

no wine, no strong drink; even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the Israelites to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to reconcile fathers to their children and the disobedient to the good sense of the upright, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.'" (Luke 1: 130-17).

Zechariah, filled with disbelief due to his and Elizabeth's advanced age, questioned the angel's message. In response, Gabriel declared that Zechariah would be struck mute until the fulfilment of these events.

True to the angel's word, Elizabeth conceived, and she remained in seclusion for five months. When Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, visited her, John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb, recognizing the presence of the Messiah.

John the Baptist would go on to become a prominent figure in the New Testament, fulfilling his role as a prophet and the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He preached repentance and baptized people in the wilderness, preparing them for the coming of the Saviour.



■ Zechariah and Gabriel, Austrian/German School, circa 1800

The story of the angel announcing the birth of John the Baptist emphasises the miraculous nature of John's conception and the divine plan behind his birth. John's life and ministry played a vital role in fulfilling the prophetic promises of the Old Testament and preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus Christ, making this announcement a significant event in the Christian narrative.

Angel Announcing the Birth of Jesus (Luke 1)

This is a well-known episode in the Christian tradition, found in the Gospel of Luke. It narrates the angelic

visitation to the Virgin Mary, foretelling the birth of Jesus, who would become the central figure in Christianity.

The story begins with the introduction of Mary, a young woman from Nazareth, who was betrothed to Joseph. One day, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to visit Mary. Gabriel greeted her with the words, "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1: 28). Mary was greatly troubled and perplexed by the angel's greeting.

Gabriel reassured Mary, telling her not to be afraid, for she had found favour with God. The angel proceeded to announce the astonishing news that Mary would conceive a child through the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son whom she should name Jesus. Gabriel emphasised that Jesus would be the Son of the Most High, and He would inherit the throne of David, ruling over an eternal kingdom.

Mary, humbled and faithful, questioned the angel about how this miraculous event could occur, as she was a virgin. Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, making her conception possible.

Mary's response to this divine announcement was an affirmation of her faith and submission to God's will. She said, "You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1: 38).

The angelic visitation to Mary marks the miraculous conception of Jesus, the Son of God, and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. This momentous event in Christian theology is celebrated as the Annunciation and is a fundamental element of the Christian faith.



■ The Annunciation to the Shepherds by Benjamin Gerritsz Cuypp, after 1633

The story underscores Mary's unwavering faith and willingness to accept her role in God's plan for the salvation of humanity. It also highlights the central Christian belief in the Incarnation, the belief that Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human, as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Angels Announcing Jesus' Birth to the Shepherds (Luke 2)

The story unfolds with shepherds watching over their flocks by night in the fields near Bethlehem. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appears to them, and the glory of the Lord shines around them. The shepherds are understandably terrified by this celestial manifestation.

The angel delivers a message of great joy and significance, saying, "Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Luke 2: 10-12)

Then, a multitude of heavenly hosts, or angels, join in praising God. Filled with awe and a sense of divine purpose, the shepherds immediately decide to go to Bethlehem to witness the fulfilment of the angel's message. There, they find Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, just as the angel had foretold. Overwhelmed by the miraculous sight, they share with Mary and Joseph the message of the angel and the heavenly host.

The shepherds' visit to the newborn Jesus serves as a symbol of the universal nature of Jesus' message and the inclusivity of God's love. The fact that these humble shepherds were the first to receive the news of Jesus' birth underscores the idea that Jesus came for all people, regardless of their social status.

The story of the angels announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds is a profound and cherished part of the Christmas narrative in Christian tradition. It highlights themes of divine revelation, humility and the universal significance of Jesus' birth. It also reminds us of the extraordinary nature of Jesus' arrival on Earth as the promised Saviour and Messiah.

Agata Pawlowska

Only love counts (part 3)



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On October 15th, 2023, Pope Francis published *C'est la confiance*, an Apostolic Exhortation for the 150th birth anniversary of St Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

myself whether heaven really existed.” At another time, she said: “When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I want to believe.” What had happened? Therese was hearing God’s call to put fire into the heart of the Church more than to think of her own personal happiness.

The transformation that was taking place enabled her to pass from a fervent desire for heaven to a constant, burning desire for the good of all, culminating in her dream of continuing in heaven her mission of loving Jesus and making him loved. As she wrote in one of her last letters: “I really count on not remaining inactive in heaven. My desire is to work still for the Church and for souls.” And in those very days she said, even more directly: “My heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.”

In those words, Therese expressed her most assured response to the singular gift that the Lord was granting her, the remarkable light that God was shedding upon her. In this way, she arrived at her ultimate personal synthesis of the Gospel, one that began with complete trust and ended in total abandonment for the sake of others. She had no doubt about the

fruitfulness of that abandonment: “I think of all the good that I would like to do after my death.” “God would not have given me the desire of doing good on earth after my death, if he didn’t will to realize it.” “It will be like a shower of roses.”

She had come full circle. “*C’est la confiance*”. It is trust that brings us to love and thus sets us free from fear. It is trust that helps us to stop looking to ourselves and enables us to put into God’s hands what he alone can accomplish. Doing so provides us with an immense source of love and energy for seeking the good of our brothers and sisters. And so, amid the suffering of her last days, Therese was able to say: “I count only on love.” In the end, only love counts. Trust makes roses blossom and pours them forth as an overflow of the superabundance of God’s love. Let us ask, then, for such trust as a free and precious gift of grace, so that the paths of the Gospel may open up in our lives.

At the heart of the Gospel

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, I urged a return to the freshness of the source, in order to emphasize what is essential and indispensable. I now consider it fitting to take up that invitation and propose it anew.

St Therese is one of the world-famous saints loved not only by Christians but non-Christians and nonbelievers as well. UNESCO has recognised her as one of the most prominent figures for modern humanity.

A shower of roses

After centuries in which countless saints expressed with great fervour and eloquence their desire to “go to heaven”, St Therese could acknowledge, with utter sincerity: “At the time I was having great interior trials of all kinds, even to the point of asking

The Doctor of synthesis

This Exhortation on St Therese allows me to observe that, in a missionary Church, “the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing.” The luminous core of that message is “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead”.

Not everything is equally central, because there is an order or hierarchy among the truths of the Church, and “this holds true as much for the dogmas of faith as for the whole corpus of the Church’s teaching, including her moral teaching”. The centre of Christian morality is charity, as our response to the unconditional love of the Trinity. Consequently, “works of love directed towards one’s neighbour are the most perfect manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit”. In the end, only love counts.

The specific contribution that Therese offers us as a saint and a Doctor of the Church is not analytical, along the lines, for example, of St Thomas Aquinas. Her contribution is more synthetic, for her genius consists in leading us to what is central, essential and indispensable. By her words and her personal experience she shows that, while it is true that all the Church’s teachings and rules have their importance, their value, their clarity, some are more urgent and more foundational for the Christian life. That is where Therese directed her eyes and her heart.

As theologians, moralists and spiritual writers, as pastors and as

believers, wherever we find ourselves, we need constantly to appropriate this insight of Therese and to draw from it consequences both theoretical and practical, doctrinal and pastoral, personal and communal. We need boldness and interior freedom to do so.

At times, the only quotes we find cited from this saint are secondary to her message, or deal with things she has in common with any other saint, such as prayer, sacrifice, Eucharistic piety and any number of other beautiful testimonies. Yet in this way, we could be depriving ourselves of what is most specific about her gift to the Church. We forget that “each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel”. Indeed, “to recognize the word that the Lord wishes to speak to us through one of his saints, we do not need to get caught up in details... What we need to contemplate is the totality of their life, their entire journey of growth in holiness, the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person”. This is all the more true in the case of St Therese, since we are dealing with a “Doctor of synthesis”.

From heaven to earth, the timely witness of St Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face endures in all the grandeur of her little way.

In an age that urges us to focus on our ourselves and our own interests, Therese shows us the beauty of making our lives a gift. At a time when the most superficial needs and desires are glorified, she testifies to the radicalism of the Gospel.

In an age of individualism, she makes us discover the value of a love that becomes intercession for others. At a time when human beings

are obsessed with grandeur and new forms of power, she points out to us the little way.

In an age that casts aside so many of our brothers and sisters, she teaches us the beauty of concern and responsibility for one another.

At a time of great complexity, she can help us rediscover the importance of simplicity, the absolute primacy of love, trust and abandonment, and thus move beyond a legalistic or moralistic mindset that would fill the Christian life with rules and regulations, and cause the joy of the Gospel to grow cold.

In an age of indifference and self-absorption, Therese inspires us to be missionary disciples, captivated by the attractiveness of Jesus and the Gospel.

A century and a half after her birth, Therese is more alive than ever in the pilgrim Church, in the heart of God’s people. She accompanies us on our pilgrim way, doing good on earth, as she had so greatly desired. The most lovely signs of her spiritual vitality are the innumerable “roses” that Therese continues to strew: the graces God grants us through her loving intercession in order to sustain us on our journey through life.

Dear St Therese, the Church needs to radiate the brightness, the fragrance and the joy of the Gospel. Send us your roses! Help us to be, like yourself, ever confident in God’s immense love for us, so that we may imitate each day your “little way” of holiness. Amen.

Given in Rome, in the Basilica of St John Lateran, on 15th October, the Memorial of St Teresa of Avila, in the year 2023, the eleventh of my Pontificate.

Pope Francis
www.vatican.va

The Chariots of God (part 1)

The Bible explicitly declares that God has indeed created angels who are pure spirits, also lesser known as extra-terrestrial intelligent beings. Angels are described in over half of the Bible's 66 books. They differ from human beings in that they are not constrained by the universe's laws of physics or the universe's space-time dimensions. They predominantly live in a realm distinct from the universe. However, God has granted them the power to enter into our realm in a physical or non-physical form.

Sometimes people ask: Is there life beyond the earth? Do they contact us? Can we contact them? The simple answer is yes, there is. We have at least nine extra-terrestrial intelligent beings in the form of the nine Choirs of Angels, we call on them often for help and assistance. They speak to us and come to our aid.

Church Teaching on the Angels

The existence of angels created by God is a dogmatic truth belonging to the treasury of the Catholic Church. It is an object of faith that angels are personal beings who possess reason and free will. They are superior to human beings, that is, in the hierarchy of creatures they are higher than human beings and closer to God. In the Letter to Colossians St Paul warns against worshipping angels (cf. Col 2: 18). It is because they are not deities, they are not gods. The highest worship is given only to God. We express this worship to God together with the Blessed Mother, the hosts of heavenly spirits and in the communion of saints.

Angels are non-corporeal beings, they have no appearance, and are distinct from human nature. There

is no relationship between them as there is between us. Jesus Himself says that they neither marry nor get married (cf. Matthew 22:30). The difference between one angel and another angel is not the same difference as between one human being and another human being. There is a personal difference between us, I am Matthew, this is Adam. There is a species difference between angels. Depending on the domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, genus each angel is different from another like a dog is different from a cat. They are totally different species.

Chariots of Messengers

The word 'angel' comes from the Latin 'angelus', which in turn comes from the Greek 'angelos', which generally means 'messenger'. The noun 'angel' does not specify the nature of the heavenly spirits but defines their duties and functions. Angels are beings destined for service. They are at God's disposal, sent by Him on specific missions. From Psalm 68 we learn that the number of angels is great; "The chariots of God are thousand upon thousand" (Ps 68: 17).

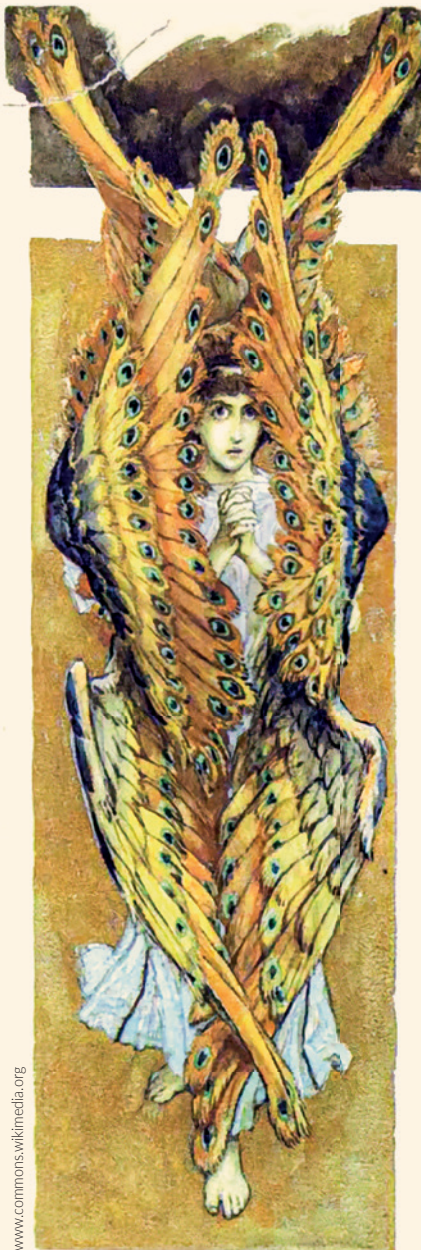
Angels embody God's presence, His care for human beings, they

hasten to their aid and help them in the work of salvation. Psalm 91:11-12 speaks of their protective role; "He has given His angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone".

In biblical terms, the ministry of angels is fulfilled in the cosmic liturgy of all creation.

Angels do not only serve us humans, they also served Jesus. Let us think of the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus, tired before his Passion, is comforted by an angel (cf. Luke 22:43). Christian tradition says that Jesus, as a human being, also had a guardian angel, and not just any guardian angel, but St Michael the Archangel. This is in accordance with Jewish tradition, for the synagogue chose St Michael the Archangel as its special protector and advocate. He was also the guardian angel of the Chosen People.

St Augustine of Hippo said that the angels were created on the first day when God created the earth, light and darkness. Heaven and light are symbols of the rational spiritual world. We learn from the Bible about the great war between the good angels and the fallen angels led by Lucifer called Satan (cf. Rev 12:7-8).



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■ The Seraph by Viktor Vasnetsov

Seraphim Burning with Love

Catholic tradition was hesitant about the number of angelic choirs, varying it between seven to eleven. Eventually St Ambrose and the Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite put things in order: there are three triads or three times three, a total of nine angelic choirs.

Let us look at each of the choirs, because each of them has a different spiritual life and different tasks. We will need this knowledge when finding ourselves in a situation in which we could pray to an angel of a particular choir to help us.

We begin with the seraphim, the highest order of angels. Isaiah writes; “In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; his train filled the sanctuary. Above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying; and they were shouting these words to each other: ‘Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth. His glory fills the whole earth’” (Is 6:1-3).

Words spoken by the Seraphim are a part of a continuous hymn to God. We know this hymn very well because we sing it at the Mass before the consecration of the bread and wine; “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts”. It is worth joining in with this seraphic singing at this moment of the Mass. We join with the angels who continually sing it before God. This hymn reminds us that the liturgy on earth is like a reflection of what happens in heaven, what happens before the throne of God and what happens with us by the altar.

The word ‘seraphim’ itself comes from ancient languages and means ‘to burn’. The name of this choir suggests that these are beings associated with fire. They are burning for love and it is the core of their spiritual life. Therefore, if a person lacks love in their life or shows too little love, they should pray to the seraphim because they are angels of love, a love that burns for God, and they are also filled with the God-given love.

Cherubim Glowing with Wisdom

The second choir of angels are the cherubim. The name also comes from ancient languages and it means ‘blessing, prayer, sacrifice’. The cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden so that man would not reach for its fruit giving immortality.

Why did God put the cherubim to guard the tree of life from man? God could not allow man to be immortal after he sinned. Do you know why? Because living immortally in a state of a grave sin is called hell. By taking away immortality from men, God saved us from eternal hell. Of course, evil spirits would have been keen on men eating the fruit from the tree of life after the original sin and then condemning themselves for ever.

The Book of Exodus refers to the cherubim standing on two sides of the ark and protecting it with their wings. They are usually depicted as people with wings or as winged animals.

The Old Testament speaks of them frequently, up to ninety times, which is a lot for a choir of angels. In contrast, the New Testament mentions them only once, in the Book of Hebrews (9:5).

The cherubim are also close to God. Just as the seraphim glows with divine love, the cherubim are filled with divine knowledge. God gives them knowledge, wisdom and prudence. One should pray to them when they lack wisdom, when they need a proper discernment of God’s will, when they do not know what to do or which course to take of if they do not understand something in their life.

There are two kinds of contemplation: seraphic and cherubic. Seraphic contemplation takes place in prayer that ignites love in our heart. We love God more and more and thus we resemble the seraphim. Cherubic contemplation comes to our intellect and broadens our perception of God, His will as well as our perception of the world, our knowledge of ourselves.

The cherubim have at least three functions. First, they still guard the way to the tree of life which is the cross of the Lord Jesus, and the fruit of this tree is the Blessed Sacrament. If you go to any church, you can be sure that the tabernacle is protected by the cherubim because it is a place where the Blessed Sacrament is kept.

The second function of the cherubim is to support the throne of God and to guard the Ark of the Covenant. Today the Ark is not an object, of course, but the Law of God, the Ten Commandments in the hearts of the faithful. Finally, the Bible says, the cherubim are the vehicle for God.

Thrones Radiating with Humility and Obedience

The third choir of angels is the thrones. St Thomas Aquinas teaches that thrones fulfil the just judgments of God. When God decides something, the thrones carry it out. Thrones are mentioned in the Book of Revelation, it mentions the thrones when speaking of twenty four old men sitting on thrones around the throne of God and giving glory to God (cf. rev 5:8-10). The prophet Ezekiel describes the thrones as angels with four faces and four wings (cf. Eze 10:9-14). Why four faces?

This means that they see, hear and feel in all directions, they are beyond



■ A tetramorph cherub, Eastern Orthodox iconography

all dimensions. Just as we live in three dimensions, they live in hundreds of dimensions, in the past, in the present, in the future, here and there, in me and beyond me, in heaven and on earth. The eyes that surround them are a symbol of God's omniscience.

The thrones are always in the presence of the Most High, humble, full of peace, submissive. It is a great thing to agree to be a throne, a chair for God. It requires great humility.

The thrones, as St Thomas Aquinas says, are always and everywhere and permanently with God.

They carry out God's judgments without pride, without ambition, concerned only that God's will be done in the world. They radiate perfection and goodness. We should call on the thrones when we lack obedience, stability and fidelity.

Fr Matthew Szerszeń CSMA

From a Smuggler to a Pilgrim of Mercy (part 1)

My earliest childhood memories are of the landscapes moving in the window of the lorry carrying our furniture. We were a normal family, except that we moved a lot; me, my brother, my dad and my mum. My father was a military pilot, he flew fighter planes.

At home we didn't talk about God or religion, it wasn't a subject, there were no prayers. I had no religious education at that time, in communist Poland. That's how it was in the military district. I had no spiritual basis.

A Broken Heart

I was a good student, so after graduating from high school I studied medicine at one of the most prestigious universities in my country. I wanted to be a doctor, but an unhappy love affair in my third year completely destroyed me. Losing a love was the end of the world for me. It hurt me so much that I sought an escape from the pain.

And I ran as far as I could. Geographically, it was Asia, the Far East. I found a job as a trader. It was rather strange. Who would offer a twenty-year-old Pole a well-paid job in Asia? I could have guessed that something was wrong. But I trusted him, and when I got to Asia it turned out that the job was actually smuggling. I was to transport electronics, cameras

and video cameras from Singapore to India for good money. I plunged into the world of the exotic, of distant lands. It was an adventure, an adrenaline rush and I made a lot of money. I did it illegally, but I told myself that I wasn't doing anything wrong, I was just taking advantage of the price difference. It's not a crime against Polish law, it's not an offence. And again, without a spiritual foundation, it's easy to manipulate some events and explain them in your own way.

Allure of Money

Over time, I traversed Asia, journeying from Pakistan to Japan, exploring most of the countries in between. Within five years, I found myself entangled with a criminal group, delving into increasingly perilous activities. Lost in the allure of money, adrenaline and challenges, I lost sight of the distinction between good and evil. Succumbing to the temptations of alcohol and substances, I spiralled deeper into a world of deception.

Equipped with multiple false passports, I crossed borders under assumed identities, deceiving customs officials, border guards and police officers alike. I played the role of a disinterested tourist, concealing my true intentions behind a facade of innocence. I honed my skills in deceit and disguise, distancing myself

further from my soul and straying from the path that God intended for me. At that time, God held no place in my life; my journey was guided by the exploration of other religions and spiritualities.

From the grandeur of Islamic mosques in Pakistan to the serenity of Shinto temples in Japan, I immersed myself in the diverse spiritual landscapes of the East. I found solace in Buddhist ashrams and sought wisdom from Buddhist monks in Nepal, delving into the rich tapestry of Eastern spirituality in all its nuances.

First Touch of Christianity

I found myself in the presence of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, drawn by her renowned reputation and the opportunity to witness her work firsthand. Visiting the place where she cared for the dying proved to be a profoundly moving experience, unlike any I had encountered before. It was there, amidst the corridors of what was once a temple dedicated to Kali, the Hindu goddess of death and rebirth, that I encountered true Christianity for the first time.

Within those sacred walls, I witnessed people from diverse backgrounds, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists alike, lying on straw mattresses, awaiting their final moments.

Separated by gender, they were attended to by sisters and volunteers, predominantly young women from Europe. These compassionate souls offered solace in the form of sacred texts - the Quran for Muslims, the Bible for Christians and water from the Ganges for Hindus. It was a gesture imbued with profound significance, providing comfort and dignity to those on the threshold of life's end.

At that moment, I was unaware that what I was witnessing was an embodiment of love - a selfless act of compassion that transcended religious boundaries.

Being present in that place felt like stepping into a completely different dimension, a stark contrast to the world of smuggling I was accustomed to. In my criminal endeavours, success relied on flair, cunning and the ability to outsmart others, constantly playing a role and hiding in the shadows. Yet, within the realm of Mother Teresa's mission, the rules were entirely different. There was a sense of tranquillity, a lack of fear or the need for pretence - everything was embraced with a gentle acceptance and a spirit of forgiveness.

This encounter marked my first conscious adult experience with God and Christianity, despite being baptised as a child without any significant engagement with the Church. However, the profound impact of that moment quickly faded from my memory as I returned to the familiar patterns of smuggling, deceit and self-deception.

Enough is Enough

As time passed, I began to realize that my life could no longer be built upon a foundation of crime. My colleagues

faced frequent arrests and long prison sentences in various countries, prompting me to contemplate my own exit strategy. Departing from an international criminal group was no easy feat, but somehow, I managed to extricate myself from that dark world.

Upon returning to Poland with substantial wealth, I reconnected with a girl I had once left behind. We embarked on building a family together, pursuing higher education, securing jobs and eventually welcoming a baby into our lives. Both employed by American companies specialising in new technologies, we

found ourselves at the intersection of computers and business. In my role as a project manager, I focused on the human aspect of projects, drawing upon my previous experiences without ever disclosing my past as a smuggler. This background endowed me with confidence and a keen ability to connect with people, skills that did not go unnoticed by my employer.

Successful Life

Recognising my talents, the company invested in my development, honing my skills in managing the



■ Mother Teresa Missionary Sisters of Love praying in the Chapel of the Mother House, Calcutta, India

human aspect of projects. I began conducting motivation and creative thinking training sessions, as well as coaching individuals in influence techniques. Specializing in achieving business goals within budgetary and time constraints, my role felt like a natural extension of my previous endeavours - albeit now conducted within the bounds of legality. I trained banks, governmental bodies and large production companies on successful project management practices and navigating multi-project environments.

The success I achieved in my career bolstered my ego and reaffirmed my intelligence and effectiveness. Riding a wave of professional ascent, I found myself esteemed, respected and valued within my field, frequently invited to speak at conferences. Alongside my professional achievements, I cherished my role as a husband and father, finding fulfilment in both my personal and professional spheres.

The Past Knocked At My Door

Suddenly, like an unforeseen tsunami crashing upon unsuspecting beachgoers, the first blow struck. In the dead of night, the police descended upon my home, and I found myself arrested due to my past activities in Asia. Initially, I clung to the hope that it would all be swiftly resolved, allowing me to return to my bustling life filled with responsibilities and meetings. However, reality soon shattered that illusion, as it became evident that my world was irreversibly altered. The heavy clang of the prison cell door echoed behind me, sealing me off from the world I once knew.

Confronted by the prosecutor, the gravity of my situation sank in. I, a man accustomed to success, armed with confidence in my abilities and assured of my capability to navigate any circumstance, was suddenly plunged into a profound sense of powerlessness unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

Consumed By Darkness

I struggled to pull myself together, attempting to employ techniques I had previously relied upon. Yet, all my efforts proved futile. Two weeks into my imprisonment, another devastating blow struck as my wife was rushed to the hospital with an advanced tumour that had remained asymptomatic until then. The anguish gripping my heart and soul was so profound that it seemed to render my body and mind immobile. In that moment, I felt as though I was hurtling headfirst into an endless abyss, consumed by a darkness devoid of hope or reprieve. It was a hellish state of hopelessness, a relentless descent into growing fear with no prospect of change or relief - not even death could offer solace. It was the bitter fruit of a life lived without God, without introspection into my true identity and purpose.

Yet, amidst the suffocating darkness of despair, something inexplicable occurred - a glimmer of light emerged from the depths of my heart. It defies adequate description, transcending the limitations of language. Though just a faint spark, it ignited within me a newfound sense of hope, my only lifeline in the abyss of despair. Without fully comprehending its significance, I instinctively gravitated toward it, intuitively sensing

that it held the key to my salvation. Driven by this flicker of hope, I requested a Bible from a prison guard, intuitively associating it with the source of my newfound hope.

As I delved into the pages of Genesis, recounting the creation of humanity from dust, I found myself amidst the cacophony of a multi-person cell, surrounded by five television sets broadcasting disparate programs. Then, in a moment etched into memory forever, all the screens flashed images of the World Trade Center collapsing - an eerie parallel to the crumbling of my own life. Yet, even in the face of such devastation, that spark of hope persisted, a beacon guiding me through the darkest of nights.

Reshaping My Life

After a year, I was granted a suspended release from prison due to my family's circumstances; my wife was undergoing radio-chemotherapy. Though the world remained unchanged, I had undergone a profound transformation. My heart had shifted, granting me a newfound perception. Previously oblivious to my surroundings, I now began to notice and appreciate shapes, colours and scents. Stepping through the prison gates, I beheld the sidewalk, its uneven slabs scattered before me. In that moment, a surge of gratitude overwhelmed me - I was free, a part of the world, engaged in life, empowered to make choices and blessed with a liberated heart.

Upon returning home, I embarked on a journey to reshape my life. I endeavoured to persuade my wife to consider a Church wedding, but before that, I committed myself to a comprehensive spiritual transformation,



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embracing all the Sacraments. With my seven-year-old daughter preparing for her First Holy Communion, I approached the priest with a request to attend the catechesis alongside her. Thus, I delved into the teachings, immersing myself in the profound wisdom of the Ten Commandments and the truths of faith.

A New Chapter

I immersed myself in the sacramental life, beginning with a pilgrimage to the Black Madonna Shrine in Jasna Góra, Częstochowa, alongside a group of disabled individuals from Warsaw. What struck me most was the presence of prisoners on temporary release, tirelessly pushing wheelchairs for almost two weeks, tending to the needs of the disabled with unwavering care and compassion.

I realised that I needed this pilgrimage as a form of spiritual burn-out, an experience of repentance to unearth the deep-seated layers of lies and deceit within myself. As a master of camouflage and manipulation, I knew I had to shed the layers of falsehood that had enveloped me. The pilgrimage served as a metaphorical plough, relentlessly digging into me - physically, mentally and spiritually. Each day, I pushed through excruciating physical discomfort, my feet blistered and sore, yet driven by a profound sense of purpose.

Częstochowa marked the beginning of a new chapter in my spiritual journey. It was there, in the confessional that I encountered God in a profound and transformative way. For the first time, I experienced unconditional love - a love that embraced me fully, without the need for

justification or worthiness. It was a revelation that shook me to the core, realising that this love was not contingent on my actions or personal transformation. Instead, it was freely given, pouring into me with overwhelming grace. In that moment, I understood that Love had been with me all along, even at my lowest point, illuminating my path and infusing my life with purpose and meaning.

The concept that Love is freely given, without conditions or expectations, is something that has remained firmly entrenched in my mind. Once someone experiences this Love, they cannot easily let it slip away - it becomes an integral part of who they are. This has been my steadfast belief throughout my journey, which spans over two decades. Each year, I embark on a pilgrimage, continuing to

search, to yearn for deeper meaning and connection.

Sadly, my marriage eventually fractured, leading us down separate paths. However, I am now a grandfather, blessed with two little grandchildren. In their innocent eyes, I see myself reflected, as they reach out to me with trust, taking my hand as we stroll together. Witnessing their budding curiosity and exploration fills me with hope for their futures. I fervently wish for them a life devoid of the struggles and hardships I faced - a life guided by Divine Mercy, where they can navigate the complexities of existence without having to experience the depths of powerlessness that shaped my own journey.

Pilgrims of Divine Mercy

Through Divine Mercy, I believe it is possible to embark on a transformative path without necessarily hitting rock bottom. It is my conviction that God can lead us to uncover our true selves, revealing a new life, a new world and a kaleidoscope of vibrant colours to enrich our existence.

In the years following my own spiritual journey, I found myself on a path of discovery, seeking to uncover the presence of God in my life. Along the way, others joined me - individuals who, like myself, had traversed through the depths of extreme powerlessness, grappling with addiction, violence, deception and oppression. Today, our group consists of twenty-two men in Poland, united under the name "Pilgrims of Divine Mercy", recognised officially by the Church. Our community emerged from the shared experience of pilgrimage, symbolizing our collective journey towards faith and renewal.

Our group comprises individuals from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Some of us have families and pursue various professions, while others have served multi-year sentences. It's not about seeking recognition or acclaim; rather, it's about embracing our unique stories and journeys. Not every occupation may be feasible after such experiences, but we strive to find meaning and purpose in our lives. We share our experiences and insights with others, visiting schools, penitentiary facilities and jails to offer guidance and support. Through our shared experiences on the road and during pilgrimages, we aim to inspire hope and foster understanding, reflecting on the transformative power of faith and the journey towards redemption.

Over the years, our pilgrimage has taken us on foot across four continents, traversing numerous countries and diverse landscapes. Each journey begins with discernment at Our Lady Shrine in Niepokalanów, where the first seeds of our pilgrimage are sown. We present our primary scenario to the bishop, who blesses and sends us forth, transforming our mission into a sacred undertaking.

Obedience has become an integral aspect of our pilgrimage, marking a departure from individual whims and desires. We recognize ourselves as a vital part of the Church, finding true freedom and spiritual fulfilment in the Sacraments and the Rosary. Through these sacred practices, we uncover the profound truth about ourselves and our relationship with God.

Through the Continents

Our pilgrimages have led us through a multitude of countries, including

Muslim nations, Orthodox territories and regions where faith is scarce, such as Western Europe. From Cuba to Georgia, from the Holy Land to Europe, our paths have crisscrossed continents, guided by the sign of the Cross. We've journeyed through Spain, Sweden, the Balkans and Russia, traversing two intersecting routes that symbolize our unwavering commitment to our faith and our pilgrimage.

One pilgrimage from 2018 etched deeply in my memory unfolded across the vast expanse of the United States. My companion was Wojtek, hailing from Alberta, Canada, specifically Edmonton. Our journey spanned from the southern reaches of the U.S., traversing through various states until we reached Guadalupe in Mexico. For Wojtek, the path stretched over five thousand kilometres. As for me, my route led from the western hub of San Francisco to the bustling metropolis of New York, covering the same distance. It seemed as though the weight of the Cross was evenly balanced between us. Our paths, like outstretched arms, intersected in Denver, Colorado.

This particular pilgrimage was unique in its logistics - we relied on a cart to accompany us on our journey. Laden with essentials like twenty litres of water to sustain us through desert stretches and camping gear, the cart served as our faithful companion. Yet, beyond the practicalities, our pilgrimage was imbued with spiritual significance. Our journey was marked by a pilgrimage from church to church, from one home to another - a testament to our guiding principle.

Roman, Poland

The Holy Eucharist

The celebration of this Most Holy Mystery, to offer it to God along with the priest as a sacrifice for their own salvation and that of the whole world, and to use it as spiritual nourishment.



For if the sacred liturgy holds first place in the life of the Church, then the Eucharistic Mystery stands at the heart and centre of the liturgy, since it is the font of life that cleanses us and strengthens us to live not for ourselves but for God and to be united to each other by the closest ties of love.

Daily Mass and Holy Communion

It is desirable to have the faithful in large numbers take an active part in the sacrifice of the Mass each and every day and receive the nourishment of Holy Communion with a pure and holy mind and offer fitting thanks to Christ the Lord for such a great gift.

They should remember these words: “The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church to see all the faithful approach the sacred banquet each and every day is based on a wish to have them all united to God through the Sacrament and to have them draw from it the strength to master their passions, to wash away the lesser sins that are committed

every day and to prevent the serious sins to which human frailty is subject.” (67) And they should not forget about paying a visit during the day to the Most Blessed Sacrament in the very special place of honour where it is reserved in churches in keeping with the liturgical laws, since this is a proof of gratitude and a pledge of love and a display of the adoration that is owed to Christ the Lord who is present there.

Dignity bestowed by Eucharist

No one can fail to see that the divine Eucharist bestows an incomparable dignity upon the Christian people.

For it is not just while the Sacrifice is being offered and the Sacrament is being confected, but also after the Sacrifice has been offered and the Sacrament confected—while the Eucharist is reserved in churches or oratories—that Christ is truly Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” For He is in the midst of us day and night; He dwells in us with the fullness of grace and of truth. (68)

He raises the level of morals, fosters virtue, comforts the sorrowful, strengthens the weak and stirs up all those who draw near to Him to imitate Him, so that they may learn from his example to be meek and humble of heart, and to seek not their own interests but those of God.

Anyone who has a special devotion to the sacred Eucharist and who tries to repay Christ’s infinite love for us with an eager and unselfish love of his own, will experience and fully understand—and this will bring great delight and benefit to his soul—just how precious is a life hidden with Christ in God (69) and just how worthwhile it is to carry on a conversation with Christ, for there is nothing more consoling here on earth, nothing more efficacious for progress along the paths of holiness.

Mysterium Fidei
Encyclical of Pope Paul VI
on The Holy Eucharist

Numbers (2), (66), (67).
The third day of September, the feast of Pope St. Pius X, in the year 1965, the third of Our Pontificate.
www.vatican.va

On the train of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Witnessing to being a Christian

In Jesus' day there was no other means of transportation than walking or riding on a donkey. The Lord Jesus travelled all the routes on foot. Only once did he drive a short section, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey before his death.

When traveling, we usually think of our arrival, departure times and by what means of transport should we travel by bus, car, train, plane?

Jesus is the driver

For example, a train driver's task is to ensure that all passengers travel safely to reach their destination. What would happen if the driver changed the route? We would not have reached our destination, we would be horrified and confused. Jesus is the driver who invites us on his train. Jesus invited the apostles to his train (St Mark 3:20-21). The task of the disciples was to follow Jesus, to listen to what He said and to proclaim His teaching. But not everyone obeyed. One apostle named Judas, who was traveling with them, got off the train of the Lord Jesus. He betrayed Him and took another train.

Each of us also has a ticket. We receive it on our birthday and board the train with it, which is called "life". Our train stops when we die and then we get off it.



Picture generated by means of AI

Reaching our destination

Our only task in life is to get on the train of the Lord Jesus and reach our destination. And what is our destination? The sky? There are stops on our life's journey where we should not get off, because it can end in a bad situation for us. What kind of stops can they be? Among other things, these are stops called: pride, hatred, jealousy, anger to name but a few. We have to get off on the last stop, which is called "heaven".

None of us will get to the "heaven" bus stop on our own. The Bible teaches that only Jesus can get us there. He is ready to help us.

Let us remember to turn to God in sincere prayer and bind ourselves for the whole journey of life with the one Saviour of the world. For this to happen, we must believe in Jesus Christ, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. In this way, we will become Christians who get on the same train with the Lord Jesus.

We will walk with God every day in the assurance of salvation. We will also discover that every Christian preaches and lives according to the teachings of the Lord Jesus. And this is what I wish you, people of God - a journey by train with the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Fr Gregory Flis, CSMA

Interested in becoming a Devotional Knight of St Michael?



The Knighthood is overseen by the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel. Many Knights read 'The Angels, Messengers from a loving God' magazine to gain more knowledge in the spirituality of St Michael the Archangel, the angels and the Divine Mercy.

This is a devotion and therefore there is no need for an official enrolment. However, if the General Animator of the Knighthood, in this case Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA, is on a mission in a particular country and a person or group want to make their promise before God, then an official enrolment can take place after the Holy Mass.

Devotional Knights are people of quiet prayer, confirmed Catholics, who are open to the Holy Spirit and give themselves to Christ, unite with Him, and help the Church by keeping demons away from Her. The main duty of the Knights is the continuous effort to be in a state of grace, in friendship with God so they can exclaim about Satan: "He has no power over me" (John 14:30).

All Knights must respect the Holy Father, bishops, priests and all the

teachings of the Church. An attitude of humility and obedience towards God and the Church should be an obvious feature of every Knight.

Any Catholic man or woman who desires to become a Knight is required to make a promise between themselves and God.

The Promise

I, (your name) a repentant sinner, renounce Satan and resolve to follow Jesus Christ. I express my faith in the Holy Trinity and the Holy Church. Today in the presence of God, St Michael and the Holy Angels, I promise to be a Knight of St Michael to the end of my life and to take part in the spiritual battle for the salvation of souls. I entrust myself to St Michael as my Patron and Protector in this devotion.

My weapons are:

- Daily Bible reading
- Daily exorcism prayer to St Michael
- Daily angelic chaplet to St Michael
- Fast each Friday on bread and water (or a good deed if a fast is impossible)
- Monthly Reconciliation
- Monthly Eucharistic Adoration
- Nine day Novena to St Michael before the feast day on 29th September

May God help me to fulfil this devotion. St Michael the Archangel pray for me. Amen.

For your daily Bible reading, choose any passage from the New Testament. It is good to start with

Matthew or Luke. Read the words and ask God to let the passage speak to you. Pay special attention to anything that strikes you and ask God what he wishes for you to draw from that message.

The Knighthood Coat of Arms

Our coat of arms represents two important mottos closely related to the patron saint of the Michaelite Fathers. It displays a round coat divided into two fields. On the left there is a gold sword, the symbol of the spiritual battle. Because of its brightness, gold symbolises what is precious and valuable and so symbolises the presence of God, majesty, joy and celebration. On the right is St Michael the Archangel – “Who is like God” the first knight and defender of the heavenly fight for justice and souls. The white background is the colour of humility, purity, holiness and virtue, as well as respect and reverence in the symbolism of the Catholic Church.

For further information on the Devotional Knights of St Michael please write to me personally or view our website:

www.stmichaelthearchangel.info
or www.stmichaelthearchangel.us

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA

General Animator
of the Knighthood

Congregation of St Michael
the Archangel

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SCAPULAR INVESTITURE

Rite of blessing and investiture of the Scapular of St Michael the Archangel.

Any priest or deacon can conduct the ceremony of blessing and bestowing of the Scapular of St Michael the Archangel according to the following ritual.

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R. Who made heaven and earth.

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And with your spirit.

Almighty, everlasting God, who dost graciously defend thy Church from the wiles of the devil through St Michael the Archangel, we humbly implore thee to bless + and sanctify + this scapular introduced for arousing and fostering devotion among thy

faithful toward this great protector. And do thou grant that all who wear it may be strengthened by the same Holy Archangel, so as to vanquish the enemies of body and soul, both in this life and at the hour of death. Through Christ our Lord.

P. Let us pray.

Lord, look upon us praying and kindly hear the supplication of your servant dedicated to the special protection of St Michael the Archangel that through his intercession s/he may avoid any offence against you and may reach holiness in this life and after death the prize of eternal life. Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen



Understanding the Creed

The Apostles' Creed opens with a declaration that echoes through the corridors of faith: "I believe in God". This simple yet profound statement serves as the cornerstone of Christian belief, setting the stage for a journey into the depths of divine revelation.

In the intricate tapestry of the Creed, every thread leads back to God. Whether it speaks of humanity or the cosmos, it does so in the context of our relationship with the Divine. Much like the Commandments that follow, each article of the Creed elaborates on the first, illuminating our understanding of God's nature and His interaction with humanity.

I believe in One God

At the heart of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed lies the confession of God's oneness - a concept deeply rooted in the Old Covenant. The Christian faith boldly proclaims the unity of God's nature, substance and essence, affirming His uniqueness in the face of myriad beliefs.

Throughout history, God revealed Himself to His chosen people, Israel, as the singular deity deserving of all reverence and love; "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:45). Prophets echoed His call to all nations,

urging them to acknowledge Him as the one true God; "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other... To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 'Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength'" (Is 45:22-24; cf. Phil 2:10-11). Jesus Himself emphasised this truth, urging His followers to love God with unwavering devotion, "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk 12:29-30).

Yet, within the Christian faith, a profound mystery unfolds: while affirming the oneness of God, believers also confess Jesus as Lord. Far from contradicting monotheism, this acknowledgment underscores the intricate relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - a divine unity beyond human comprehension.

God reveals His name

Central to God's revelation is His disclosure of His name to His people. A name, laden with meaning and significance, serves as a window into one's essence and identity. Through



■ Burning Bush by Sébastien Bourdon, 17th cent.

the revelation of His name, God invites intimacy, making Himself accessible and knowable to humanity. If God has had a name, He is no longer an anonymous force.

Throughout salvation history, God progressively unveiled His identity through various names. Yet, the pinnacle of revelation occurred in the encounter between God and Moses at the burning bush - an event that marked the threshold of the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai.

In the unfolding narrative of faith, the Creed serves as a roadmap, guiding believers through the labyrinth of divine revelation. With each affirmation, it beckons us to delve deeper into the mysteries of God's nature and His enduring presence in human history.

In the heart of sacred history lies a divine encounter - an exchange between Moses and the living God that echoes through the ages. Amidst the flickering flames of a bush that burns yet remains unconsumed, God reveals Himself to Moses, declaring, "I am the God of your father, the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Ex 3:6).

The Divine Name

In the hushed reverence of this sacred moment, Moses poses a question that resonates with humanity's deepest longing: "What is your name?" To which God responds, "I AM WHO I AM." In this enigmatic declaration, God unveils His mysterious identity—a name both revealed and veiled, echoing the essence of His infinite being.

YHWH - "I AM HE WHO IS." In this divine appellation lies the essence of God Himself - a name shrouded in mystery, yet overflowing with profound significance. It speaks of God's transcendence beyond human comprehension, His ineffable presence and His unfailing faithfulness throughout generations.

God Reveals His Faithfulness

Embedded within the sacred name "I AM" is a testament to God's enduring faithfulness - a steadfast love that spans the ages. From the patriarchs of old to the present generation, God's unwavering commitment to His people remains unchanged, a beacon of hope in a world plagued by uncertainty.

The Holiness of God

In the presence of the Divine, humanity is humbled, confronted with its own frailty and insignificance. Moses, taking off his sandals and veiling his face in reverence, and Isaiah, crying out in awe, "Woe is me! I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips" (Is 6:5), bear witness to the overwhelming

holiness of God - an encounter that elicits both fear and adoration.

Amidst the trembling awe of His holiness, God reveals Himself as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:5-6; cf. 34:9). His love, surpassing all understanding, extends even to the most wayward of His children - a love that culminates in the gift of His Son for the redemption of humanity.

God Is Truth and Love

In the grand tapestry of divine revelation, God's nature is unveiled as Truth and Love - attributes that permeate every aspect of His being. His word, a beacon of unerring guidance, illuminates the path of righteousness, while His love, boundless and eternal, embraces all of creation in its embrace.

Belief in the One God transcends mere intellectual assent - it is a transformative journey that encompasses every facet of life. It beckons us to contemplate the majesty of God, to live lives of gratitude and thanksgiving, and to embrace the unity and dignity of all humanity.

In the sacred name "I AM", we discover not only the essence of God Himself but also the profound mystery of His unfathomable love - a love that sustains us in every trial and triumph, guiding us ever closer to the heart of the Divine.

Implications of Faith in One God

Believing in God, the only One, and loving Him with all our being has enormous consequences for our whole life:

- It means coming to know God's greatness and majesty: "Behold, God is great, and we know him not" (Job 36:26). Therefore, we must serve God first.
- It means living in thanksgiving: if God is the only One, everything we are and have comes from him: "What have you that you did not receive?" (I Cor 4:7). "What shall I render to the LORD for all his bounty to me?" (Ps 116:12).
- It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all men: everyone is made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26).
- It means making good use of created things: faith in God, the only One, leads us to use everything that is not God only insofar as it brings us closer to him, and to detach ourselves from it insofar as it turns us away from him:
*My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from you.
My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to you
My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to you
(prayer by St Nicolas of Flue).*
- It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity. A prayer of St Teresa of Jesus wonderfully expresses this trust:
*Let nothing trouble you
Let nothing frighten you
Everything passes
God never changes
Patience obtains all
Whoever has God
Wants for nothing
God alone is enough.*

Angela Taylor

Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church 199-227

The Year of Jubilee 2025: A Time of Renewal and Grace



This announcement has been met with great enthusiasm and anticipation as the global Catholic community prepares for this significant period of reflection, celebration and renewal of faith.

A Tradition of Mercy and Renewal

In ancient Judaism, the Jubilee Year, known as the “year of the yōbēl” (meaning “of the goat” because it was announced by the sound of a goat’s horn), was a holy year celebrated every 50 years. During this time, Mosaic law required that slaves be freed and land returned to its original owners, recognizing God as the true owner of all land.

In the Christian era, after the first Jubilee in 1300, Pope Boniface VIII set the frequency of Jubilee celebrations to every 100 years. However, after a request from the people of

Pope Francis has proclaimed the year 2025 as a Year of Jubilee, a special time of grace, renewal and spiritual enrichment for Catholics around the world.

Rome, Pope Clement VI reduced it to every 50 years in 1342.

In 1389, Pope Urban VI decided to celebrate Jubilees every 33 years, to honour the lifespan of Christ, and called for a Jubilee in 1390. Although Pope Urban VI died before it was celebrated, Pope Boniface IX carried it out.

In 1400, at the end of the 50-year cycle, Pope Boniface IX granted a Jubilee indulgence to pilgrims who came to Rome, even though he had not declared a Jubilee year.

Pope Martin V celebrated a new Jubilee in 1425, opening the holy door of St John Lateran for the first time. Pope Nicholas V was the last to celebrate a Jubilee on the 50-year cycle in 1450.

Pope Paul II changed the interval to 25 years, and the next Jubilee was celebrated in 1475 by Pope Sixtus IV. Regular Jubilees continued from then on. However, the Napoleonic wars prevented the Jubilees of 1800 and 1850 from being celebrated. The Jubilees resumed in 1875, after Rome became part of the Kingdom of Italy, but it was celebrated without the usual grandeur.

In the Catholic Church, the Jubilee Year holds a profound spiritual significance, offering the faithful an opportunity to seek God’s mercy, forgiveness and grace in a unique and powerful way. Pope Francis, known for his emphasis on mercy and compassion, has chosen the theme “Pilgrims of Hope” for this Jubilee Year, encouraging all Catholics to embark on a journey of spiritual growth and renewal.

Pilgrimage and Forgiveness

One of the central aspects of the Jubilee Year is the pilgrimage to designated holy sites. These pilgrimages are acts of devotion and penance, symbolizing the journey of the faithful towards a deeper relationship with God. Special indulgences are granted to those who make these pilgrimages, attend confession, participate in the Eucharist and pray for the Pope’s intentions. The Holy Doors of the major basilicas in Rome, which are typically sealed, will be opened during the Jubilee, allowing pilgrims to enter and receive special graces.



■ Pope Francis

A Call to Compassion and Solidarity

Pope Francis has emphasized that the Jubilee Year is not just a time for personal spiritual renewal but also a call to action. He urges the faithful to live out the principles of mercy, compassion and solidarity in their daily lives. This includes reaching out to the marginalized, caring for the poor and working towards justice and peace. The Pope's message resonates with his broader vision of a Church that is a "field hospital," tending to the wounds of humanity and bringing hope to those in need.

Global Celebrations and Initiatives

Throughout 2025, dioceses and parishes around the world will host a variety of events, including prayer services, retreats and charitable activities, to celebrate the Jubilee. Special initiatives focused on social justice, care for creation and interfaith dialogue will be encouraged, reflecting the Church's commitment to addressing

the pressing issues of our time. The Jubilee Year is also an opportunity for the Church to emphasize the importance of family, community and the dignity of every human being.

Embracing the Spirit of Jubilee

In anticipation of the Year of Jubilee in 2025, Pope Francis has declared 2024 as a Year of Prayer. This special year is dedicated to spiritual preparation, inviting Catholics around the world to deepen their faith and renew their commitment to living out the principles of mercy, forgiveness and solidarity.

The Year of Prayer is an invitation for all Catholics to embark on a journey of spiritual renewal. It is a time to reflect on our relationship with God, to seek His guidance and to strengthen our connection with the divine through dedicated prayer and contemplation. Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of this preparation, encouraging the faithful to cultivate a deeper sense of spirituality and to open their hearts to the transformative power of prayer.

Prayer is at the heart of the Christian life. Throughout 2024, Catholics are encouraged to make prayer a central part of their daily routine. This includes personal prayer, communal prayer and participation in the sacraments. Special focus is given to the Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration and the Liturgy of the Hours. The aim is to create a foundation of prayer that will support and enhance the celebrations of the Jubilee Year.

The Jubilee Prayer

*Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.*

*May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds
of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from
within both humanity and the whole
cosmos in the sure expectation of
a new heaven and a new earth, when,
with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.*

*May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever. Amen.*

Agata Pawlowska

Based on: www.vatican.va
www.iubilaeum2025.va

Chaplet of St Michael

L. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A. *Amen*

Say the following prayer on the medal:

O God, come to my assistance.

O Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, etc.

1. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Seraphim, may the Lord make us worthy to burn with the fire of perfect charity. Amen.

(1 Our Father on the first large bead, 3 Hail Marys on the next three small beads)

2. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Cherubim, may the Lord vouchsafe to grant us grace to leave the ways

of wickedness, to run in the paths of Christian perfection. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

3. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Thrones, may the Lord infuse into our hearts a true and sincere spirit of humility. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

4. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Dominions, may the Lord give us grace to govern our senses and subdue our unruly passions. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

5. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Powers, may the Lord vouchsafe to protect our souls against the snares and temptations of the Devil. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

6. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Virtues, may the Lord deliver us from evil and suffer us not to fall into temptation. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

7. By the intercession of St Michael and the Celestial Choir of Principalities, may God fill our souls with a true spirit of obedience. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

8. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Archangels, may the Lord give us perseverance in faith and in all good works, in order that we gain the glory of Paradise. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)



■ The miraculous statue of St Michael the Archangel

9. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Angels, may the Lord grant us to be protected by them in this mortal life and conducted hereafter to eternal glory. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

Recite on the next four beads:

1 Our Father in honour of St Michael

1 Our Father in honour of St Gabriel

1 Our Father in honour of St Raphael

1 Our Father in honour of our Guardian Angel

O glorious prince, St Michael, chief and commander of the heavenly hosts, guardian of souls, vanquisher of rebel spirits, servant in the house of the Divine King, and our admirable conductor, who shines with excellence and superhuman virtue, vouchsafe to deliver us from evil, who turn to you with confidence, and enable us by your gracious protection to serve God more and more faithfully every day. Amen.

Prayer of Pope Leo XIII

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the Divine Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who wander throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.